

## Replicating Historic Collections in the NPS

**I**t seems to be unanimous that “cloning” is becoming the most significant use of some museum collections; not only in a “for profit situation,” but for other purposes as well. The use of accurate reproductions in living history programs and reenactments, where consumptive use negates the use of original materials, has long necessitated the need for reproductions of original items. This practice is becoming increasingly more common to provide appropriate items for use in exhibits where original materials would be subjected to damage or loss, have not survived over time, or significant numbers of like objects are not available (i.e. barracks furnishings).

The use of reproductions for exhibit purposes at Fort Laramie National Historic Site began, on a large scale, with the furnishing of the 1874 Cavalry Barracks. This project has generated some interesting uses of materials from Fort Laramie collections, as well as many Park Service sites and other museums with 19th-century military and civilian collections. A vast amount of drawings of product packages and furniture and equipment, labels, and stencils have been produced using collection materials for use in the production of replicated items for exhibit. An active network among 19th-century military posts, such as Fort Davis, Fort Larned, Fort Hartsuff, Fort Union, and many others, has developed to share these materials for similar exhibit projects. One example of sharing ideas and

materials is a mug created from an original from the Fort Bridger museum collection and an insignia copied from an original in the Fort Laramie collection. These collection materials were replicated for use in the Cavalry Barracks. The mug bearing the 2nd Cavalry Company K insignia is on exhibit in the barracks messroom and is also a “hot” sales item through our co-operating association.

In 1988, the enlisted men’s bar at Fort Laramie was opened to the public for the sale of soft drinks. This new function created a need for the removal of original objects from the exhibit and the addition of replicated or reproduction furnishings. Private enterprise has even been bitten by the reproduction bug. Anheuser-Busch generously donated documented replicas of artifacts from their collections to this project.

The escalating use of reproductions in exhibits presents some interesting challenges for the curator/collection manager and many issues will need to be addressed. How will this change our park specific acquisition policies? How will this affect preservation of original materials (less original objects on exhibit and more in storage)? How do we account for these items which are used in a multi-purpose fashion, both as exhibit items and for living history programs?

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### NPS Natural History Working Group Meeting

The National Park Service (NPS) Natural History Working Group met in July 1995. The group was established by the Associate Director, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnerships. It advises the NPS Museum Management Program on matters related to curation and documentation of NPS natural history collections.

The group made recommendations and developed functional requirements and data elements for the Biology, Geology, and Paleontology components of a new automated collection management system. The group proposed modifications to the current Automated National Catalog System natural history data

fields. ANCS data will be migrated into the auto updated system.

Some requirements the working group felt the new system must have include:

- quick and efficient searching and indexing on a windows-based platform
- use of standard data tables (X based)
- capability for additional expansion: for example, adding subdiscipline modules
- public access capability for research and interpretive use
- the ability to easily convert old Automated National Catalog System records
- capability for selective and incremental backups
- support for visual imaging

- network-ready and multi-user capability

The working group recommends separate locality, treatment, and people modules. These will allow parks to track additional information on specimen preparation and treatment, threatened and endangered species, preparator, source of accession, and cataloger.

Group members are currently working on defining new data elements for on-line help.

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